

EDITORIAL

On 27 June 1934 a massive marble monument to William Barak (c. 1824–1903) was unveiled in Healesville, 50 kilometres north-east of Melbourne, by the chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Sir John MacFarland, with prayers read by Reverend Donald Cameron, former moderator of the Presbyterian Church. Barak had been the Ngurungaeta, or Elder, of the Wurundjeri-willam clan, and an influential leader for his people. The site, in the main street of Healesville, had been chosen by MacFarland with members of the Australian Natives' Association, a mutual society with membership restricted to white men born in Australia. The donor of the stone and instigator of the memorial, 96-year-old Anne Fraser Bon, was also present, sheltering at a distance from the persistent rain. Newspaper accounts recorded only one Indigenous witness: 'an aged Aboriginal, who exhibited a pair of boomerangs held in a pose'.¹

A friend and supporter of Barak over many years, Anne Fraser Bon commissioned the portrait in oils of Barak by Florence Fuller in 1885, and this was for a time displayed in Queen's Hall in Parliament House, Melbourne, before it was transferred to the collection of State Library Victoria.² It shows Barak in European dress, and while this gives him the same dignity as the white men with whom he negotiated, it also colonises him, as does the memorial, for its inscription reads, 'To the Glory of God and to the Memory of BARAK, Last Chief of the Yarra Yarra Tribe of Aborigines and his Race. Barak Died at Coranderrk. 15th August. 1903. Aged 85. A Sincere Christian'.

Bon and her friends may have been sincere in their wish to commemorate Barak, but they were wrong to assume he was the last of his people. Over his long life he negotiated for the Wurundjeri and other clans with the invaders who all but destroyed his culture. He may have adopted Christianity, but in his paintings he recorded a more ancient and enduring belief. Three of these

Opposite: Unveiling of the memorial to William Barak at Healesville, Victoria, 27 June 1934. Sir John MacFarland, chancellor of the University of Melbourne, is to the immediate right of the memorial. The memorial was the gift of Anne Fraser Bon. Photographer unknown, glass negative, Frank Endacott collection, H93.50/97



paintings are in State Library Victoria and are the subject of the first two articles of this issue. Nikita Vanderbyl explores the context and development of Barak as an artist and the provenance of the works, while Myles Russell-Cook, curator of Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Victoria, provides a personal reflection on Barak as an artist.

The next three articles reflect on the role of three women in Victoria's cultural life. Patricia Clarke tells the heroic story of Frances Taylor, founder and editor of the journal *Woman's World*. Shona Dewar has edited the reminiscences of Ursula O'Connor from her 38-year career as a librarian at the Library, showing her impact on the Library and her profession. Catherine Padmore revisits the archive of Joan Lindsay, author of the novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, which continues to haunt our imagination over 50 years after its first publication.

The final two articles reflect on the Library's collection. Libby Melzer describes the production and likely origin of a remarkable 13th-century manuscript pocket Bible, one of the first medieval manuscripts acquired by the Library. The research for this article was inspired by the 2008 exhibition at State Library Victoria, *The Medieval Imagination: illuminated manuscripts from Cambridge, Australia and New Zealand*. And your guest editor tells the story of the library of Carlos Barron Lumsden, one volume of which has recently been acquired by the Library.

This issue of *The La Trobe Journal* continues a fine tradition of good writing about the collections and the place of State Library Victoria. As an institution of cultural memory, telling and retelling stories are part of its purpose, and like the ancient oral traditions of William Barak's people they help to ground us in our time and our place.

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